

The Rawhah

The centre-piece of the Dawrah is the Rawhah. The word “*rawhah*” linguistically is applied to an excursion at any time from midday until nightfall, as in the hadith narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim: “An excursion in the morning (*ghadwah*) or an excursion in the latter part of the day (*rawhah*) in the path of Allah is better than this world and everything it contains.” The word also has a connection to the *ruh*, the spirit. The scholars of Hadramawt traditionally used the name *rawhah* for the lessons they would give after ‘Asr in which they would focus upon teaching the sciences of the heart and reading the books of the Imams of Tasawwuf. Imam al-Haddad says in his *Adab Suluk al-Murid* (translated as “Good Manners”): “The time following the ‘Asr prayer, if kept alive, has a powerful affect in attracting provision for the heart.”

In this year’s Dawrah Habib ‘Umar bin Hafiz (may Allah preserve him) continues the commentary which he began three years ago on *Qut al-Qulub*, Imam Abu Talib al-Makki’s foundational work in the science of Tasawwuf. He will also comment on “the Counsel,” a poem by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahman bin ‘Ali Ba ‘Alawi. Using the book and the poem, Habib ‘Umar lays out the foundations which every seeker needs on the path to Allah. He emphasises the importance of sincerity in seeking spiritual process during these lessons and often repeats that by reading the words of these great scholars we are in fact sitting in their presence.

The gathering is usually rounded off with the recitation of some of the poetry of the great Imams of the Path, and then with the poetic supplication mentioned in these pages. Those attending the session then shake hands with the Shaykh and with each other, physically reinforcing the bonds that have been established during the gathering.

What follows is a brief biography of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahman bin ‘Ali followed by a rough translation of his poem, along with the Arabic text.

Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman bin `Ali

His Lineage

He is Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman bin Shaykh `Ali bin Shaykh Abu Bakr al-Sakran bin Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman al-Saqqaf bin Shaykh Muhammad Mawla al-Dawilah, bin `Ali Mawla Darak, bin `Alawi al-Ghuyur, bin al-Faqih al-Muqaddam Muhammad, bin `Ali, bin Muhammad Sahib Mirbat, bin `Ali Khali` Qasam, bin `Alawi, bin Muhammad Sahib al-Sawma`ah, bin `Alawi, bin `Ubaydullah, bin al-Imam al-Muhajir il-Allah Ahmad, bin `Isa, bin Muhammad al-Naqib, bin `Ali al-`Uraydi, bin Ja`far al-Sadiq, bin Muhammad al-Baqir, bin `Ali Zayn al-`Abidin, bin Husayn al-Sibt, bin `Ali bin Abu Talib and Fatimah al-Zahra`, the daughter of our Master Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets ﷺ.

His Life

When we look at the life of the great scholar and knower of Allah, Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman bin `Ali, we see in it the features of many of the great scholars of the Ba `Alawi way. He was born in the blessed city of Tarim in 850 (1446). In this pious environment he memorised the Qur`an at a young age and set about the pursuit of knowledge under the supervision of his father, Shaykh `Ali, and his uncle, Imam `Abdullah al-`Aydarus. Shaykh `Ali and Imam al-`Aydarus were among the first of the `Alawi scholars to author books and Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman studied all his father's works with him. Here we see the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next which is crucial for its preservation. The books of Imam al-Ghazali have been greatly venerated by the `Alawi scholars since they first became available. We thus find that Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman studied *Ihya` `Ulum al-Din* at his father's hands no less than forty times, and subsequently taught it to his students forty times.

His father and uncle did not, however, believe that it was sufficient for Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman to receive knowledge from them alone, in spite of their stature. Rather they encouraged him to study under the other scholars of Tarim, among them Shaykh Sa`d bin `Ali Madhaj and the great jurist, Shaykh `Abdullah bin `Abd al-Rahman

Bilhaj Ba Fadl.¹ Furthermore, they encouraged him to leave Tarim to deepen his knowledge. As a result Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman received knowledge from the scholars of Aden (where he spent four years), Zabid and Mecca and Medina.

Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman's mentors did not merely wish for him to accumulate knowledge. They were keen to see him act upon his knowledge and to travel the spiritual path, which he did at their direction. In his youth he would go with his cousin, Shaykh Abu Bakr al-'Adani, to worship by night in the Nu'ayr Valley outside Tarim. They would both read a third of the Qur'an in prayer and then return to Tarim before Fajr. Here we see the value of having a companion to assist one on the path. Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman and Shaykh Abu Bakr were inseparable and remained together for around thirty-eight years. Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman had a great love for worship, especially in the night. He said: "Never leave prayer in the night for all good is contained in it. Every *wali* (friend of Allah) was chosen by Allah in the night, for Allah manifests Himself in the second half or last third of the night. Look how often Allah mentions the night in the Qur'an: ***Transcendent is the One Who caused His slave to journey by night; We have indeed revealed it in the Night of Power; We revealed it in a blessed night.*** If you are able, then always be awake in the last portion of the night." He would have a bath before every compulsory prayer. He loved the poor and weak and the orphans and he would never turn away anyone that asked him for anything. He was known for his close adherence to the Sunnah inwardly and outwardly. He shared his predecessors' love for visiting the Prophet Hud (alayhi salam) and composed a poem describing the visit and its benefits which is always recited in the gatherings which are held during the Grand Visit in Sha'ban.

This combination of knowledge, action and spiritual instruction bore its fruits in Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman, who reached the pinnacle of inner and outer knowledge. The 'Alawi way is, however, based upon benefiting others, and not merely oneself. Thus once his father and his other teachers gave him permission to give *fatwa* and teach the inward and outward sciences, he set about sharing his vast knowledge. Among his students were his son, Ahmad Shihab al-Din, the ancestor of all the great imams from the tribe of Shihab al-Din, as well as the hadith scholar, Sayyid Muhammad bin 'Ali Khird, Sayyid 'Umar bin Muhammad Ba Shayban and Shaykh Ma'ruf bin 'Abdullah Ba Jamal.

¹ Author of *al-Muqaddimah al-Hadramiyyah* and *al-Mukhtasar al-Latif*, which are both foundational texts in the Shafi'i school

His poems, which are gathered in his *Diwan*, reflect his spiritual state and also contain many counsels for the spiritual traveller. Several of his poems are recited regularly in the *Hadarah* of Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman al-Saqqaf. One of them is the poem which we are now studying.

His Death

As a rule, the scholars of the Ba `Alawi way shun fame and prefer to remain unknown. Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman bin `Ali was no exception to this rule and in spite of his greatness he is hardly known beyond Hadramawt. He lived his life as his forefathers had lived until his death in Tarim in Muharram 923 (1517). He was buried behind his father in the Zanbal cemetery. May Allah raise him and benefit us by him.

“The Counsel”

Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman bin `Ali

أَلَا يَا ابْنَ الْفَقِيهِ يَا عَبْدَ إِسْجَعٍ بَنِيَّةً تَيَقَّظْ فِي دُجَى اللَّيْلِ
وَاسْمَعْ ذِي الْوَصِيَّةِ

1. O son of a scholar, O `Abud,² go forth with a good intention

Awaken in the darkness of the night and listen to this advice

² Here Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman is addressing his student, Shaykh `Abud bin Muhammad bin al-Faqih bin Salim. It is the way of the pious to address their counsels to their students specifically and to all those who wish to benefit generally.

إِلَى الرَّحْمَنِ تَبُّ مِنْ ذُنُوبِكَ وَالْخَطِيئَةِ وَلَا زِمَ ذِكْرَ مَوْلَاكَ بُكْرَةً
وَالْعَشِيِّ

2. Repent to the All-Compassionate from your sins and wrongdoings

And remember your Lord constantly, day and night

عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ وَاطْبُ عَلَيْهَا فِي الْجَمَاعَةِ وَلَا تَغْفَلَ عَنِ الذِّكْرِ لِلَّهِ
كُلَّ سَاعَةٍ

3. Perform the prayer consistently in congregation

And do not neglect the remembrance of Allah at all times

وَصُرَّ الْبَطْنُ وَاصْبِرْ عَلَى طُولِ الْمَجَاعَةِ تَغَانِمُ سَاعَةَ الْعُمَرِ مِنْ قَبْلِ
الْمَنِيَّةِ

4. Accustom your stomach to long periods of hunger

So that you take advantage of every moment before death

وَبَعْدَ الْمَغْرَبِ ارْكَعْ وَاقْرَأْ بِالتَّدْبِيرِ أَوْ اذْكُرْ وَإِنْ صَفَا الْقَلْبُ
فَاسْبَحْ فِي التَّفَكُّرِ

5. After *Maghrib* pray and recite [the Qur'an] and reflect upon it

And remember Allah if the time is right and swim in the sea of reflection..

إِلَى وَقْتِ الْعِشَاءِ احْذَرِ تَنَامَ أَصْلًا وَتَهَمُّرُ عَسَى تُحْمَى وَتُحْظَى
بِالطَّافِ خَفِيَّةٍ

6. Until the time of '*Isha*' and beware of sleeping and allowing your mind to wander

Perhaps you will be protected and blessed with subtle gifts

وَلَا تَسْمُرْ فَتُقَمَّرَ عَنِ الطَّاعَاتِ وَالِدِّينِ تَبَعْدُ جَمَّ جِدًّا مِنْ
السُّفْهَاءِ الشَّيَاطِينِ

7. Do not stay up late,³ for you will lose out on acts of obedience

Distance yourself completely from foolish devils

تَجَنَّبْ لَا تُجَالِسْ سِوَى الضُّعَفَاءِ الْمَسَاكِينِ وَتُبْ بَعْدَ الطَّهَارَةِ
وَنَمْ صَافِي الطَّوِيَّةِ

³ Meaning do not stay late if you are engaged in things which are of no benefit in the next life

8. Only keep the company of the weak and poor

And repent after purifying yourself and sleep with a pure heart

وَقُمْ فِي آخِرِ اللَّيْلِ صَلِّ وَاقْرَأْ وَهَلِّلْ
كَلَامَ اللَّهِ وَرَتِّلْ
تَفَهَّمْ سِرَّ مَعْنَى

9. Rise in the last part of the night and pray and recite and say *la ilaha ill'Allah*

Seek to understand the secret meaning of Allah's speech and recite in a measured way

وَبِاسْتِغْفَارِ مَوْلَاكَ قَبْلَ الْفَجْرِ كَمِلْ
وَصَلِّ الصُّبْحَ تُكْفَى مِنْ اللَّهِ
كُلَّ أَذِيَّةٍ

10. Finish by seeking the forgiveness of your Lord before dawn

And pray *Fajr* and Allah will protect you from all harm⁴

وَبَعْدَ الصُّبْحِ فَادْكُرْ إِلَى أَنْ تَطْلُعَ الشَّمْسُ
وَكُنْ فِي الْيَوْمِ أَحْسَنَ فِي
الطَّاعَاتِ مِنْ أَمْسٍ

⁴ Here Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman points to the hadith: "Whoever prays Fajr in congregation will be in Allah's protection." (Narrated by Ibn Majah)

11. After Fajr remember Allah until sunrise

And in acts of obedience be better today than you were yesterday

وَلَا تَكْسَلْ عَنِ الْخَيْرِ وَادْكُرْ قِصَّةَ الرَّمَسِ وَقُمْ صَلِّ الضُّحَى
بَعْدَ إِشْرَاقِ الْمُضِيَّةِ

12. Do not leave acts of goodness out of laziness and remember the story of the grave

Then stand up and pray *Duha* after the sun has risen fully

وَلَا تَهْتَمْ أَصْلًا بِرِزْقِكَ فَهُوَ مَضْمُونٌ ضَمِنَ بِهِ بَارِئُ الْكَوْنِ
بِسِرِّ الْكَافِ وَالنُّونِ

13. Have no concern whatsoever for your provision, for it has already been promised to you

The Creator of the Universe guaranteed it by the secret of the *Kaf* and the *Nun*⁵

وَكُنْ بِاللَّهِ يَا ابْنَ الْفَقِيهِ مَشْجُونٌ مَجْنُونٌ فَإِنَّ الْعَبْدَ يَزْهُو بِرَبِّهِ
فِي الْبَرِيَّةِ

⁵ This refers to the two letters which make up the word “*kun*” in Arabic, meaning “be.” If Allah wants something to be He merely says “Be” and it is.

14. Be in your relationship with Allah, O son of a scholar, in a state of sadness and madness

For the slave's only source of pride is his Lord

وَعُضُّ الطَّرْفِ يَا ابْنَ الْفَقِيهِ عَنْ كُلِّ فَانِي وَلَا تَعْشَقْ سِوَى اللَّهِ
وَاحِدٌ لَيْسَ ثَانِي

15. Do not allow your gaze, O son of a scholar, to fall upon any ephemeral thing

And love no-one but Allah alone

تَعَالَى كَامِلِ الْوَصْفِ فِي كُلِّ الْمَعَانِي سَعِدَ مَنْ كَانَ قَلْبُهُ سُقْيَ
شَرِبَةٍ هَنِئَةٍ

16. Transcendent is He, the Possessor of all attributes of perfection

Felicitous is the one whose heart tastes a sweet drink

وَتَهُ وَافْخَرْ وَعَرَبِدْ وَبِالْأَصْوَاتِ غَرِّدْ وَلَا تُصْنَعْ لِعَاذِلٍ وَلَا تَسْمَعْ
مُفْنِدْ

17. Be wholly absorbed in your Lord, proud of your slave-hood to Him and call people to His path with a sweet voice

And do not listen to those who criticise and those who are envious

وَكُنْ يَا ابْنَ الْفَقِيهِ لِلْمُحِبِّ الصَّبِّ مُسْعِدٌ
سِوَى الْمَوْلَى بَرِيَّةٌ
بِنِيَّةٍ صَادِقَةٍ مِنْ

18. O son of a scholar, help those who truly love Allah

With a sincere intention, free from seeking other than your Lord

وَحُسْنُ الظَّنِّ بِالْمُسْلِمِينَ الْكُلِّ فَالزَّمْ
وَلَا تَتَّعِبْ مِنَ الذَّمِّ
وَلَا بِالْمَدْحِ تَفْرَحْ

19. Maintain a good opinion of all the Muslims at all times;

Do not be happy if someone praises you and not become angry if someone criticises you

وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُصْطَفَى الْبَدْرِ الْمُتَمِّمِ
مَعَ أَلْفِي تَحِيَّةٍ
وَسَلَّمَ دَائِمَ الدُّوبِ

20. May Allah bestow prayers and peace for evermore upon the Chosen One, the Full Moon,

Along with countless greetings for ever more

Prayer at the end of the Rawhah

This is the prayer which is read at the end of the Rawhah, followed by its translation:⁶

رَبَّنَا انْفَعْنَا بِمَا عَلَّمْتَنَا رَبِّ عَلِّمْنَا الَّذِي يَنْفَعُنَا
رَبِّ فَقِّهْنَا وَفَقِّهِ أَهْلَنَا وَقَرِّابَاتِ لَنَا فِي دِينِنَا

مَعَ أَهْلِ الْقُطْرِ أَنْتَى وَذَكَرَ رَبِّ وَفَقِّهِمْ لِمَا
تَرْتَضِي قَوْلًا وَفِعْلًا كَرَمًا وَارْزُقِ الْكُلَّ حَلَالًا دَائِمًا
وَأَخِلَاءَ أَتَقِيَاءَ عُلَمَاءَ

نَحْظِي بِالْخَيْرِ وَنُكْفَى كُلَّ شَرٍّ رَبَّنَا أَصْلَحْ لَنَا كُلَّ الشُّؤْنِ
وَأَقْرِ بِالرِّضَا مِنْكَ الْعُيُونِ وَاقْضِ عَنَّا رَبَّنَا كُلَّ الدِّيُونِ
قَبْلَ أَنْ تَأْتِيَنَا رُسُلُ الْمَنُونِ

وَاعْفِرْ وَاسْتُرْ أَنْتَ أَكْرَمُ مَنْ سَتَرَ وَصَلَاةُ اللَّهِ تَغْشَى
مَنْ إِلَى الْحَقِّ دَعَانَا وَالْوَفَا الْمُصْطَفَى
وَعَلَى الْآلِ الْكَرَامِ الشُّرَفَاءَ بَكِتَابٍ فِيهِ لِلنَّاسِ شِفَاءُ

وَعَلَى الصَّحْبِ الْمَصَابِيحِ الْغُرَرِ

⁶ The first set of verses are by Habib Ahmad bin `Umar bin Sumayt and the second set by Habib `Abdullah bin Husayn bin Tahir, may Allah have mercy on them both.

اللَّهُمَّ أَهْدِنَا بِهَذَاكَ ، وَاجْعَلْنَا مِمَّنْ يُسَارِعُ فِي رِضَاكَ ، وَلَا تُؤَلِّنا
وَلِيًّا سِوَاكَ ، وَلَا تَجْعَلْنَا مِمَّنْ خَالَفَ أَمْرَكَ وَعَصَاكَ ، وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ
عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَسَلَّمَ ، وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ
الْعَالَمِينَ .

يَا رَبَّنَا اعْتَرَفْنَا	بِأَنَّنا اقْتَرَفْنَا
وَأَنَّنا أَسْرَفْنَا	عَلَى لَظَى أَشْرَفْنَا
فَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا تَوْبَهُ	تَغْسِلْ كُلَّ حَوْبَهُ
وَاسْتُرْ لَنَا الْعَوْرَاتِ	وَأَمِنْ الرُّوْعَاتِ
وَاعْفِرْ لَوَالِدَيْنَا	رَبِّ وَ مَوْلُودَيْنَا
وَالْأَهْلَ وَالْإِخْوَانَ	وَسَائِرِ الْخِلَانِ
وَ كُلِّ ذِي مَحَبَّةٍ	أَوْجِيرَةٍ أَوْ صُحْبَةٍ
وَالْمُسْلِمِينَ أَجْمَعِ	آمِينَ رَبِّ أَسْمَعْ
فَضْلًا وَجُودًا مَدًّا	لَا بِاِكْتِسَابٍ مَدًّا
بِالْمُصْطَفَى	نَحْظَى بِكُلِّ سُولٍ
الرَّسُولِ	عَلَيْهِ عَدَّ الْحَبِّ
صَلَّى وَسَلَّمَ رَبِّي	عِدَادَ طَشٍّ
وَآلِهِ وَالصَّحْبِ	السُّحْبِ
وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ	فِي الْبَدْيِ وَالتَّأْهِ

O Lord benefit us by that which You have taught us

O Lord teach us that which benefits us

O Lord give us and our families and our relations
And the people of the region male and female
Understanding in our religion

O Lord give us and them the enabling grace to do and say
What pleases You out of Your generosity
And give all of us lawful provision always
And give us God-fearing knowledgeable friends
Grace us with goodness and protect us from all evil

Our Lord rectify all our affairs
And grant us the joy of Your pleasure
And settle all our debts
Before the Angel of Death and his helpers come to us
And forgive and conceal our faults, O Most Generous of Concealers!

And may the blessings of Allah cover the Chosen One
The one who called us to the truth and good faith
With a Book in which there is healing for people
And may His blessings cover his honoured and noble family
And the Companions, the shining torches

O Allah grant us Your guidance

And make us amongst those who hasten to seek Your pleasure
And do not entrust us to a guardian other than You
And do not make us amongst those who disobey Your commands.
Peace and blessings be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his family and
Companions. Allah praise is due to Allah Lord of the Worlds.

O Lord we admit that we have committed sins
And that we have exceeded the bounds
(So that) we are on the brink of a blazing fire
So turn to us with a repentance
Which washes away every wrongdoing
And conceal our faults
And calm our fears
And forgive our parents and our children
And our family, our brothers and all our friends
And all those we love and our neighbours and companions
And all the Muslims
Amin! O Lord listen to us!
Out of Your grace, Your generosity and Your favour
Not because of our own actions
Through the Messenger the Chosen One
Grace us with all we ask for
My Lord send peace and blessings upon him

The number of every grain
And his family and Companions
As much as rain falls from the clouds
And all thanks and praise be to Allah
In the beginning and the end.